

Message Text

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TO USMISSION NATO

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, NATO, PINR, SY, XF, LE

SUBJECT: IS REQUEST FOR INFORMATION ON SYRIA

REF: USNATO 5735

1. PURSUANT TO REQUEST REFTTEL, FOLLOWING IS SANITIZED TEXT OF RECENT ANALYSIS ON "SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON," WHICH MISSION MAY PASS TO R. MEUWIS OF INTERNATIONAL STAFF. WE REGRET UNAVOIDABLE DELAY IN EVOLVING APPROPRIATE MATERIAL FOR MEUWIS, AND HOPE THIS WILL BE OF USE TO HIM.

2. BEGIN TEXT. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY. SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON DURING LAST SEVEN MONTHS OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE HAS OPERATED ON SEVERAL LEVELS AND AT TIMES HAS APPEARED SELF-CONTRADICTIONARY. GROWING SYRIAN AND PALESTINIAN INVOLVEMENT SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN RELUCTANTLY, WHATEVER
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THE ULTIMATE SARG AND PLO GOALS, LARGELY BECAUSE OF THE

STEADY DEGRADATION OF GOL'S CAPABILITY TO MAINTAIN INTERNAL SECURITY. LEBANON'S TRADITIONAL POLITICAL APPARATUS, IN PARTICULAR, LOST THE ABILITY TO DEAL WITH LEBANESE LEFTISTS AND PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISTS AND WAS FORCED TO TURN TO SARG AND THE PLO FOR HELP. NOT AVERSE TO INCREASING THEIR INFLUENCE IN LEBANON, BOTH RESPONDED POSITIVELY - PLO MAINLY BECAUSE IT NEEDED CONTINUATION OF PERMISSIVE CLIMATE

ALLOWING IT TO OPERATE FREELY IN LEBANON AND SARG BECAUSE IT FEARED ISRAELI MILITARY INTERVENTION SHOULD INTERNAL LEBANESE SITUATION DETERIORATE OUT OF CONTROL. AT SAME TIME BOTH PLO AND SARG HAVE WISHED TO MAINTAIN POSITIONS OF LEFTISTS AND REJECTIONISTS WITH WHOM BOTH HAVE STRONG IDEOLOGICAL TIES. SARG IN PARTICULAR HAS FOUND ITSELF IN CONTRADICTORY POSITION OF MEDIATING BETWEEN WARRING PARTIES, WHILE CONTINUING TO ARM LEFTISTS AND REJECTIONISTS. ON OCCASION, SARG-SPONSORED SA'IQA, AS WELL AS FATAH, HAS INTERVENED MILITARILY TO MAKE SURE THE PHALANGE WOULD NOT WIN. IN SUM, SARG'S "OBJECTIVITY" HAS TENDED TO OPERATE ONLY AS LONG AS LEFTISTS WERE HOLDING THEIR OWN. NEVERTHELESS, SARG STILL MUST RECEIVE MAJOR CREDIT, WHATEVER ITS MOTIVES AND FEARS, FOR PERIODICALLY AMELIORATING CRISIS. END SUMMARY.

3. FOUR ROUNDS OF FIGHTING WITHIN THE PAST SEVEN MONTHS HAVE GREATLY REDUCED THE ABILITY OF LEBANESE GOVERNMENT TO MAINTAIN INTERNAL SECURITY. GOVERNMENT LEADERS HAVE HAD TO DEPEND UPON SUBSTANTIAL SYRIAN AND PALESTINIAN INVOLVEMENT TO CONTROL LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN RADICALS.

4. SYRIAN OBJECTIVES. DURING EARLIER ROUNDS OF FIGHTING SYRIA'S IMMEDIATE GOALS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN LIMITED TO A CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES AND THE PRESERVATION OF THE LEBANESE STATE. AT THE SAME TIME, THE SYRIANS HAVE HOPED TO INCREASE THEIR INFLUENCE IN LEBANON.

5. IN ORDER TO ATTAIN THESE GOALS, SYRIA:

-- MEDIATED BETWEEN WARRING FACTIONS;

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-- USED SA'IQA FORCES, WHICH IT CONTROLS, TO POLICE AREAS AND CONTROL REJECTIONIST PALESTINIANS AND LEBANESE LEFTISTS;

-- PERMITTED THE SUPPLY OF ARMS TO RADICAL LEBANESE MILITIAS TO INCREASE ITS INFLUENCE WITH THEM.

6. SYRIA'S PEACEKEEPING EFFORTS WERE ONLY marginally

SUCCESSFUL. VIGOROUS MEDIATION THROUGH EARLY OCTOBER BY FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM PROVIDED LITTLE MORE THAN SHORT RESPITES IN THE LEBANESE STRUGGLE.

7. OTHER ASPECTS OF SYRIA'S LEBANON POLICY HAVE HAD MIXED RESULTS, REFLECTING SYRIA'S MISJUDGING THE MOTIVES AND CAPABILITIES OF THE VARIOUS FACTIONS. THE ARMS SYRIA SUPPLIED TO THE LEFTISTS MAY HAVE SPURRED THEM ON.

TRADITIONAL MUSLIM LEADERS, WITH WHOM THE SYRIANS WERE ACCUSTOMED TO DEALING, NO LONGER CONTROLLED THEIR MINIONS. MOREOVER, CONTRARY TO SYRIAN EXPECTATIONS MANY LEFTISTS BELIEVED THEIR OWN RHETORIC PROFESSING SOCIAL REVOLUTION. AS A CONSEQUENCE, MORE SA'IQA UNITS HAD TO BE INTRODUCED IN TRIPOLI TO CONTROL THE SITUATION.

8. SA'IQA'S ROLE AS POLICEMAN, USUALLY ACTING IN CONCERT WITH PLO/FATAH, WAS PREDICATED ON PREMISES THAT:

-- ONLY THE RADICAL LEFTISTS WOULD INITIATE CLASHES, CARRYING THE STRUGGLE TO CHRISTIAN NEIGHBORHOODS; AND

-- THE MILITARY POWER OF THESE RADICALS AND THE REJECTIONIST PALESTINIAN ALLIES WAS EQUAL TO OR GREATER THAN THAT OF THE PHALANGE AND OTHER CHRISTIAN MILITIAS.

9. BOTH PREMISES PROVED TO BE FALSE. THE CHRISTIANS INITIATED MORE THAN THEIR SHARE OF THE HOSTILITIES AND THEY INFLICTED HEAVY LOSSES ON THEIR SYRIAN-SUPPLIED OPPONENTS. IN ORDER TO PREVENT SIGNIFICANT PHALANGIST GAINS, SA'IQA UNITS RELINGUISHED THEIR ROLE AS POLICEMAN AND JOINED THE LEFTISTS IN ENGAGING THE PHALANGE.

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10. SA'IQA'S DECISION TO DO THIS MAY HAVE BEEN MADE IN BEIRUT, RATHER THAN IN DAMASCUS, BUT IN ANY EVENT SYRIAN OFFICIALS TACITLY APPROVED SA'IQA'S ROLE. THEIR AGREEMENT IS NOT SO MUCH A DELIBERATE CHANGE IN SYRIAN INTENTIONS AS A REFLECTION OF SYRIA'S INTEREST IN MAINTENANCE OF THOSE FACTIONS FRIENDLY TO IT.

11. THE CONTINUED INTRODUCTION OF FEDAYEEN UNITS INTO LEBANON SEEMS LIKELY. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS, HOWEVER, COMBINE TO MAKE AN OVERT MILITARY INTERVENTION UNATTRACTIVE TO SYRIA.

-- THE SYRIANS DO NOT WANT TO GIVE THE ISRAELIS AN EXCUSE TO MOVE INTO SOUTHERN LEBANON OR TO RESUME HOSTILITIES ON THE GOLAN. LEBANON IS NOT SYRIA'S MAJOR FOREIGN POLICY

CONCERN, AND DAMASCUS IS CONCERNED THAT DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON COULD INVOLVE IT IN A CONFLICT WITH ISRAEL AT A TIME AND ON TERMS NOT OF DAMASCUS' CHOOSING.

-- SINCE KHADDAM PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE DURING THE LAST ROUND OF FIGHTING IN BRINGING PRIME MINISTER KARAMI TO POWER, SYRIA'S PRESTIGE IS INVOLVED IN KEEPING KARAMI IN OFFICE.

12. ALTHOUGH THE SARG DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE USING SA'IQA TO OUST THE CURRENT FATAH LEADERSHIP OF THE PLO, DAMASCUS IS UNDOUBTEDLY SEEKING TO INCREASE SYRIAN INFLUENCE IN FEDAYEEN RANKS. SYRIA DESIRES ENHANCEMENT OF SA'IQA, NOT IN OPPOSITION TO BUT STILL AT THE EXPENSE OF FATAH. ZUHAYR MUHSIN'S SECOND HAT, HEAD OF THE PLO MILITARY DEPARTMENT, ALSO GIVES SA'IQA AND THEREFORE SYRIA, FURTHER INFLUENCE OVER THE FEDAYEEN. FATAH LEADERS, AS A RESULT, HAVE FELT THE PRESSURE OF AN ASSERTIVE SA'IQA AND HAVE HAD TO TAILOR THEIR ACTIONS TO MEET THIS CHALLENGE. ON BALANCE, SA'IQA HAS SUCCESSFULLY USED THE LEBANESE CRISIS TO IMPROVE ITS STANDING AND INFLUENCE WITHIN THE FEDAYEEN MOVEMENT. END TEXT.

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